

VZCZCXRO3278
RR RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDBU RUEHLH RUEHNEH RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHNT #1269/01 2030937
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 220939Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1179
INFO ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
CIS COLLECTIVE
NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0205
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 001269

SIPDIS
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/07/22

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: U/S Burns Meeting with Uzbekistan Civil Society and ICRC

CLASSIFIED BY: Holly Lindquist Thomas, P/E Officer, Department of State, Pol-Econ Office; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: On July 12, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Bill Burns and a delegation of U.S. officials met with five Uzbek civil society activists. The group explained that during the years since the 2005 Andijon events, civil society had been all but decimated. They were hopeful that increased engagement with the West in general, and with the United States in particular, would give civil society groups space to develop again. The activists also discussed intimidation of the defense bar and growing extremism among prison and migrant populations. On July 13, Burns met with representatives from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to discuss efforts to access places of detention. End summary.

[¶2.](#) (C) Under Secretary Burns, NSC Senior Director for Russia and Central Asia Michael McFaul, and Ambassador Norland met with five representatives of Uzbekistan's civil society: human rights analysts Sukhrob Ismailov and Shukhrat Ganiev, attorneys Gulnora Ishankhanova and Kamilov Ruhiddin Nuriddinovich, and activist/journalist Abdurakhmon Tashanov.

[¶3.](#) (C) Human rights advocate and journalist Abdurakhmon Tashanov offered a historical perspective on the role of civil society in Uzbekistan, asserting that between 2000 and 2005, civil society in Uzbekistan was at its most free and most effective. He attributed this relative freedom to close relations with the United States and other western countries, as well as to the resulting increased participation of international NGOs in Uzbek civil society. Following Andijon, the GOU severely curtailed civil society by refusing to register both local and international NGOs, as well as by limiting the activities of those NGOs it allowed to remain. According to Tashanov, human rights in Uzbekistan across the board, from political prisoners to child labor to civil liberties, were at an all-time low. He believes, however, that improved relations with the United States and the West will bring a "wind of freedom" that could renew civil society, bring a return of international NGOs, and restore an environment in which NGOs could positively impact the full range of human rights issues.

¶4. (C) Two attorney activists spoke about intimidation of the defense bar. Under new licensing rules, every defense attorney, regardless of years of practice, must pass a grueling examination procedure that includes standing before a panel to answer questions on any conceivable area of law. The activists reported that this testing procedure was being used to rein in the activities of long-serving defense attorneys who took controversial cases. Gulnora Ishankhanova, one of the attorney participants, noted that good defense attorneys were either losing their licenses or refusing to take the exam. She asserted that the government was further intimidating those that remained, noting that the same Ministry of Justice appointee decided both testing procedures and disciplinary actions against defense attorneys. Thus, before taking any case, a defense attorney will have to consider how it might impact his or her ability to practice.

¶5. (C) Meeting participant Kamilov Ruhiddin Nuriddinovich was a case in point. For twenty years he defended human rights advocates on trial for what have been largely considered trumped up charges. Following this new bar exam he was stripped of his license; he was unsure of his future professional activities. He said that other, less-controversial attorneys did not even show up for the exam, yet still managed to retain their licensure. He concluded the exam is "not to test the skills of the lawyer, but to test loyalty to the government," and he lamented the death of the "last remaining element of civil society" - the bar association.

TASHKENT 00001269 002 OF 002

¶6. (C) Human rights analyst Shukhrat Ganiev reported that religious radicalism in prisons was increasing among disaffected prisoners, and that this radicalism was impacting society. He noted a rise in hate crimes even in traditionally tolerant places, like Bukhara, and he asserted that the GOU was not giving this problem enough attention. He warned that without a free press, the problem would only get worse. According to Ganiev, radicalism was growing among young Uzbek migrant workers in Kazakhstan and Russia. They were isolated from society, experienced racism and intolerance, and were concentrated in "Uzbektown" or "Tajiktown" enclaves, where discontent and extremism festers and grows.

¶7. (C) Senior Director McFaul articulated President Obama's concern for civil society, where President Obama himself started out. McFaul expressed the administration's commitment to increased engagement in Uzbekistan, referencing President Obama's Moscow speech at the New Economic School. He also expressed the administration's desire for engagement to lead to a free and active civil society once again. Under Secretary Burns emphasized his respect for the work of the civil society representatives.

ICRC

¶8. (SBU) On July 13, ICRC Regional Head Yves Giovannoni and Deputy Regional Head Raffaello Muller briefed the delegation on the development of their programs in Uzbekistan and on their efforts to gain greater access to places of detention. They noted that there had been real progress in Uzbekistan in recent years, in contrast to some other Central Asian countries, but progress had stalled after last year's successful six-month trial period. ICRC is now awaiting the GOU's formal confirmation that ICRC will be granted access to most detention facilities, with the exception of solitary confinement facilities belonging to the National Security Service. The ICRC can live with this - but first it needs a final GOU response laying this out.

BUTCHER
BUTCHER